



AGENDA ITEM: 10

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

16 March 2015

IMPROVEMENT AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN 2015-16

Report by Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To present for members' approval the draft Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan 2015-16.

Introduction

- 2 Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in Wales are required to prepare, publicly consult on, and publish an Improvement Plan for each financial year.
- 3 The FRAs (Improvement Plan) Wales Order 2012 requires FRAs to publish their Improvement Plan as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December in the year prior to the financial year to which the Improvement Plan relates.

Information

- 4 At its meeting of 16 June 2014, the Authority considered the recommendations of the Executive Panel regarding the Authority's draft improvement objectives for 2015-16 and beyond.
- 5 At its meeting of 22 September 2014, members received a verbal report on the emerging findings of early consultation with North Wales councils, and were informed that the draft consultation document would be published for the public consultation.

- 6 Following the close of the consultation period, the Authority's Executive Panel considered the responses received and approved the production of a final draft of the Improvement Plan 2015-16 based on three improvement objectives for approval by the full Fire and Rescue Authority at this meeting. This final draft is attached at Appendix 1.

Recommendation

- 7 Members are asked to approve the final draft of the Improvement Plan 2015-16 for publication on the Authority's website before the end of March 2015.



***NORTH WALES
FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY***

***COMBINED IMPROVEMENT
AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN***

***Continuation for
2015-16***

Updated and published March 2015



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Introduction

This year's annual Improvement Plan focuses on specific improvement objectives for 2015-16.

At a time of extraordinary financial challenge, the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to continuing to provide excellent prevention services, fire safety enforcement services and emergency response to a range of incidents including fire, flooding and road traffic accidents.

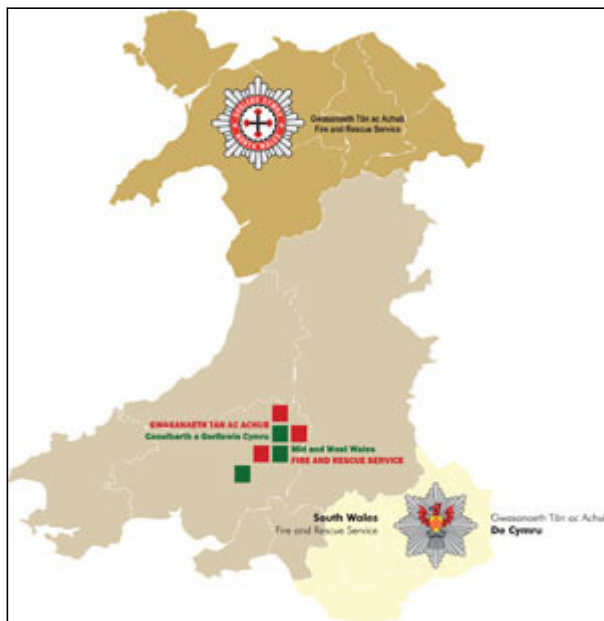
The Authority remains committed to playing its part in building stronger and safer communities, but also acknowledges that for the future the financial situation means that being able to sustain service delivery will require a great deal of flexibility and innovation.

Fire and rescue authorities have been extraordinarily successful in Wales in reducing the incidence of fires, but this cannot be taken for granted, and we do not intend to lose sight of the importance of prevention in reducing the level of demand on fire and rescue services as well as on other parts of the public sector, such as the health service.

The Authority consulted on its draft improvement objectives in the last quarter of 2014, and is grateful for the many responses it received. This document now sets out its agreed strategic improvement objectives for 2015-16.

**Our mission is to make North Wales
a safer place to live, work and visit.**

North Wales Fire and Rescue



In Wales, fire and rescue services are provided through Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities.

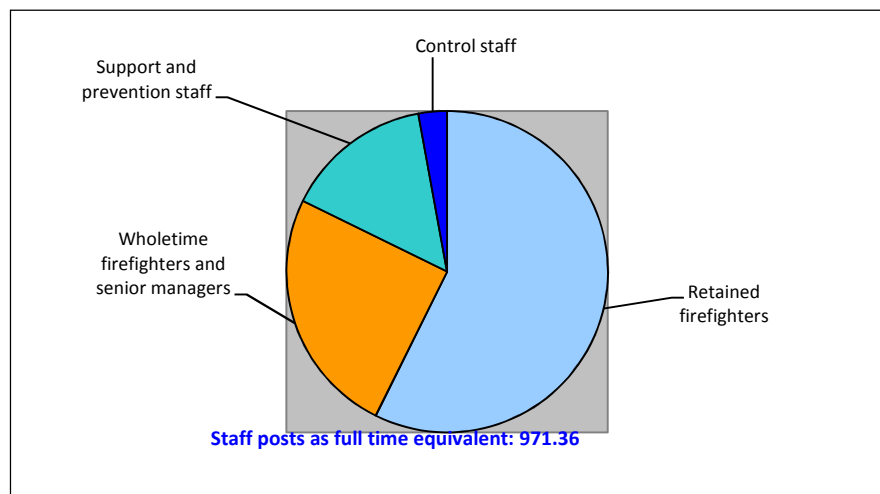
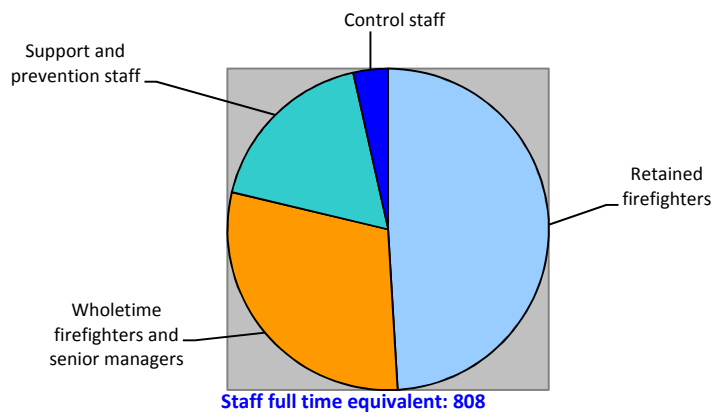
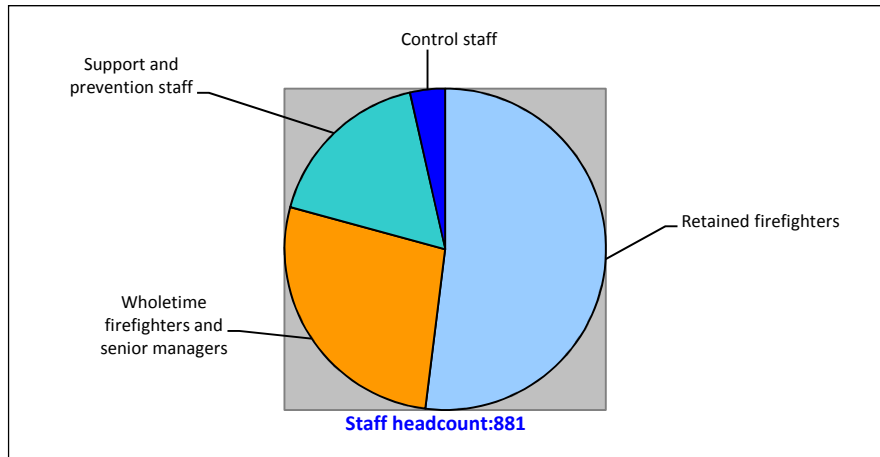
North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is one of three combined fire and rescue authorities in Wales. These were set up in 1996 as part of local government reorganisation, and replaced the former eight fire brigades in Wales.

The full **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** comprises 28 county councillors nominated from the six unitary authorities of North Wales: Anglesey County Council (3); Conwy County Borough Council (5); Denbighshire County Council (4); Flintshire County Council (6); Gwynedd Council (5); Wrexham County Borough Council (5). The number of representatives from each constituent authority is determined according to the size of the population.

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service is headed by the Chief Fire Officer who has strategic leadership, corporate management and operational responsibility for the Service. He also provides professional advice to the Authority.

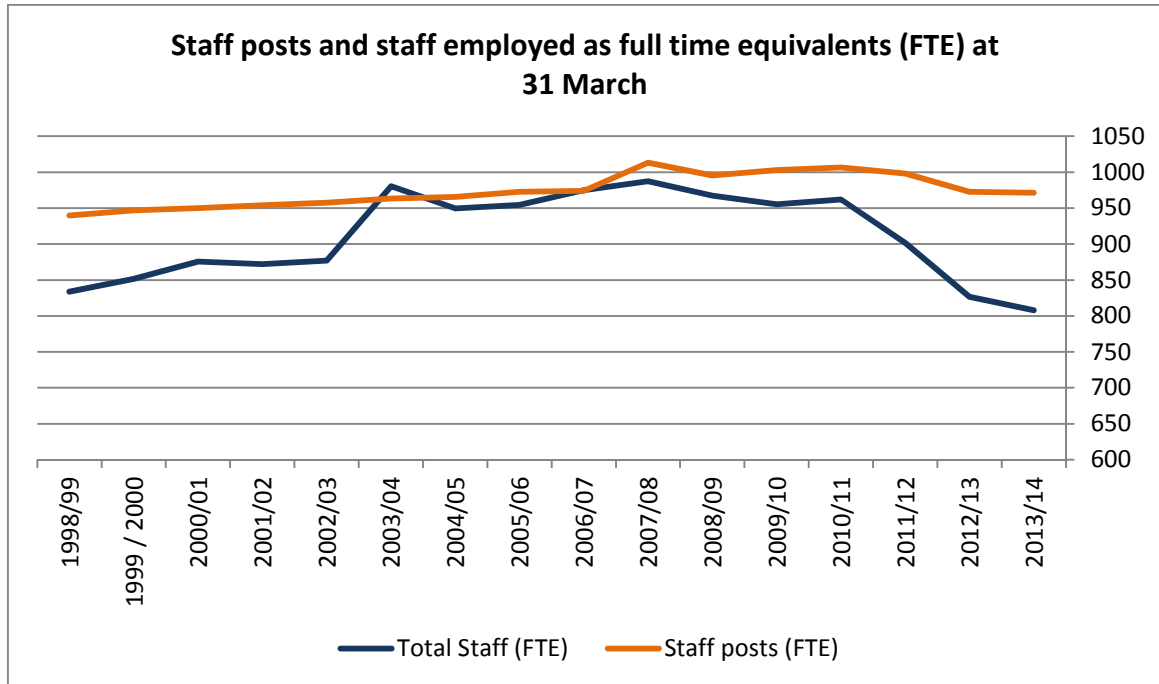
Please refer to the Appendix to this document for details of specific legislation and other information.

About North Wales Fire and Rescue – Staffing (March 2014)



About North Wales Fire and Rescue – Staffing

The number of staff posts and staff employed has changed over recent years. The graph below shows the extent of these changes between March 1999 and March 2014.

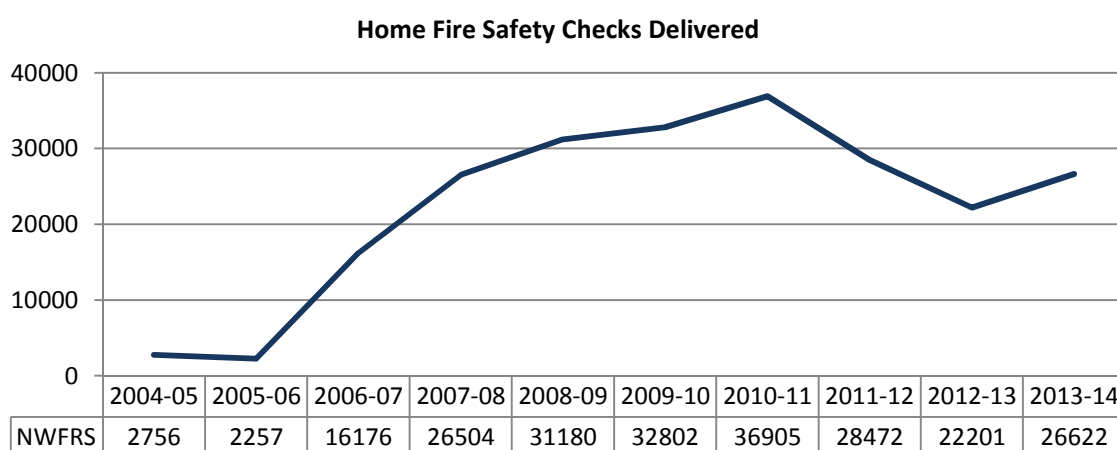


Recent financial pressures have forced a reduction in the size of the workforce, but with careful planning it has been possible to achieve that through natural wastage and voluntary redundancies.

Changes within the organisational structure have involved detailed consideration of matching work to the most appropriate sections of the workforce, bearing in mind skills sets and terms and conditions of service. This has included the transfer of community and business fire safety posts to non-operational staff.

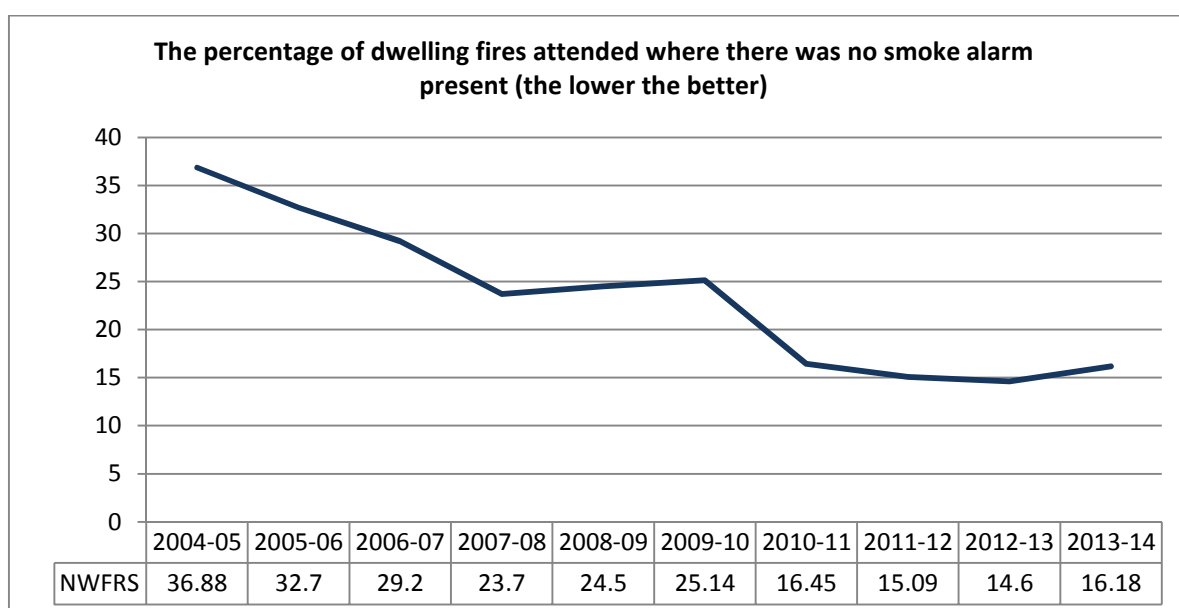
North Wales Fire and Rescue over the last ten years

North Wales's high profile programme of providing Home Fire Safety Checks has meant that over 200,000 free checks have been delivered to households in the area since 2004.



According to the Welsh Government's 2013-14 National Survey for Wales¹, 94% of households in North Wales have at least one working smoke alarm.

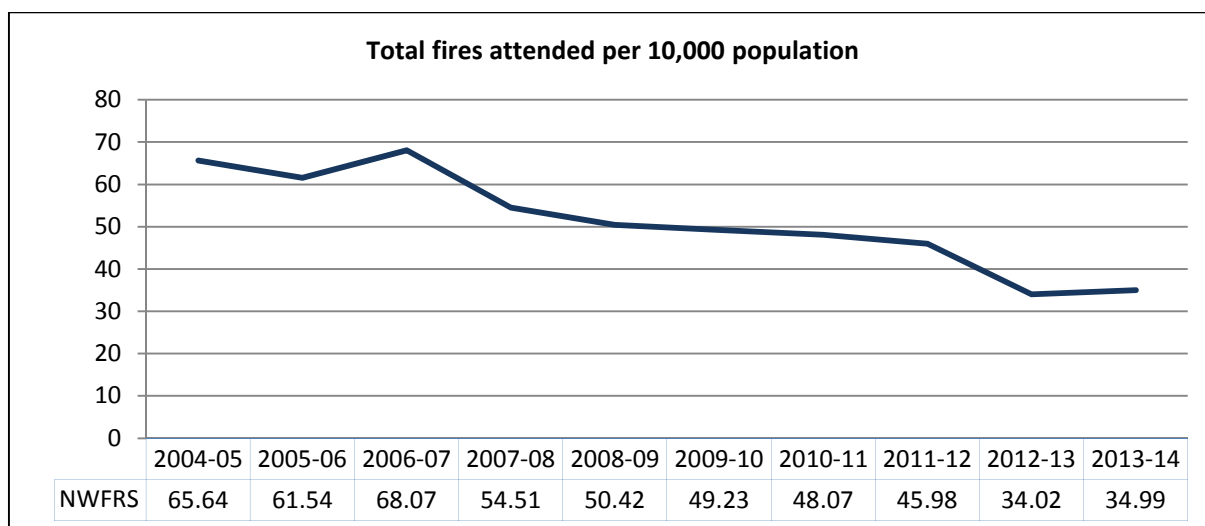
Only a minority of homes where fire has occurred are found to have no smoke alarm already fitted.



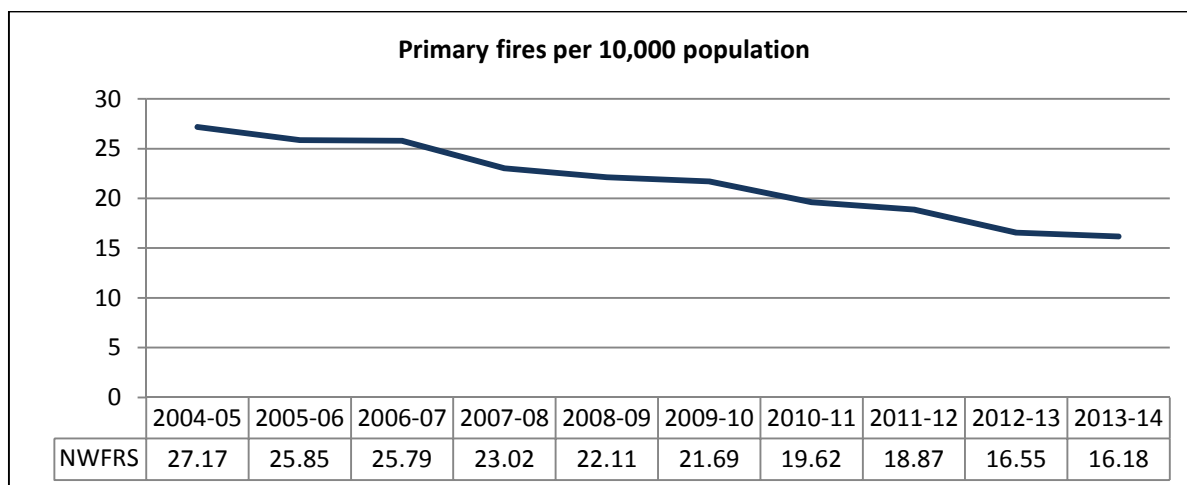
¹ Table 20

North Wales Fire and Rescue over the last ten years

The fire prevention strategy in North Wales has been very successful. The number of fires attended in the area has fallen in most years over the past decade, with the exception of 2006-07 and 2013-14. Overall, the number has fallen from 4,414 to 2,416.

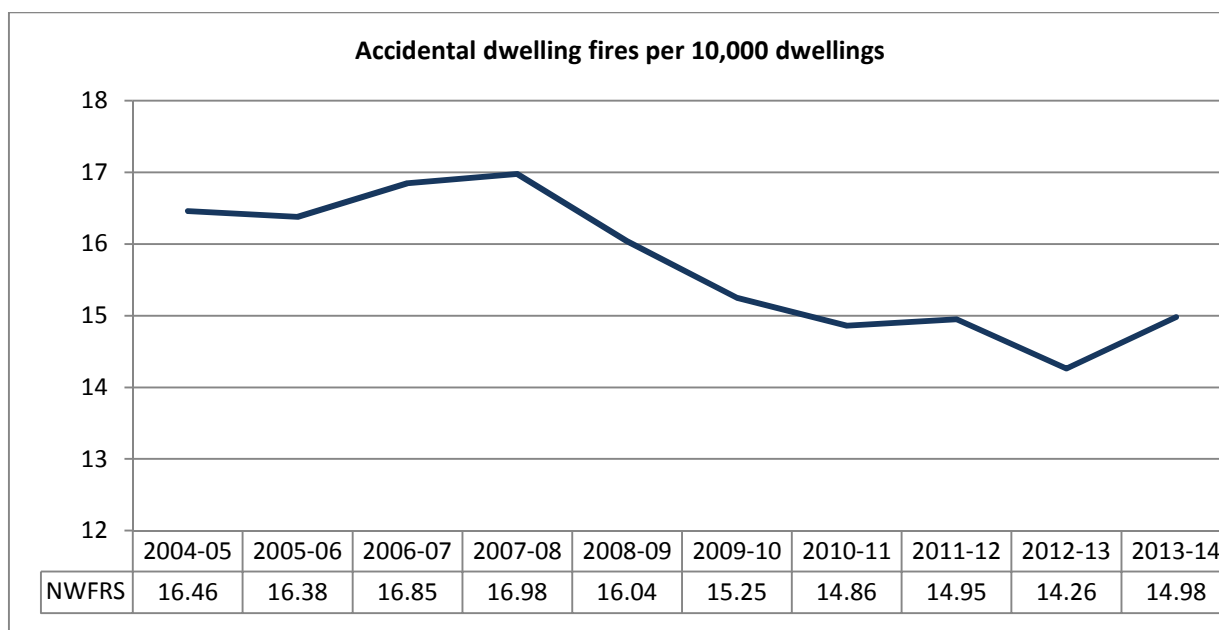


The number of primary fires (that is, the larger fires, involving property and/or casualties) has fallen from around 35 per week to around 21 per week (from 1,827 to 1,117).

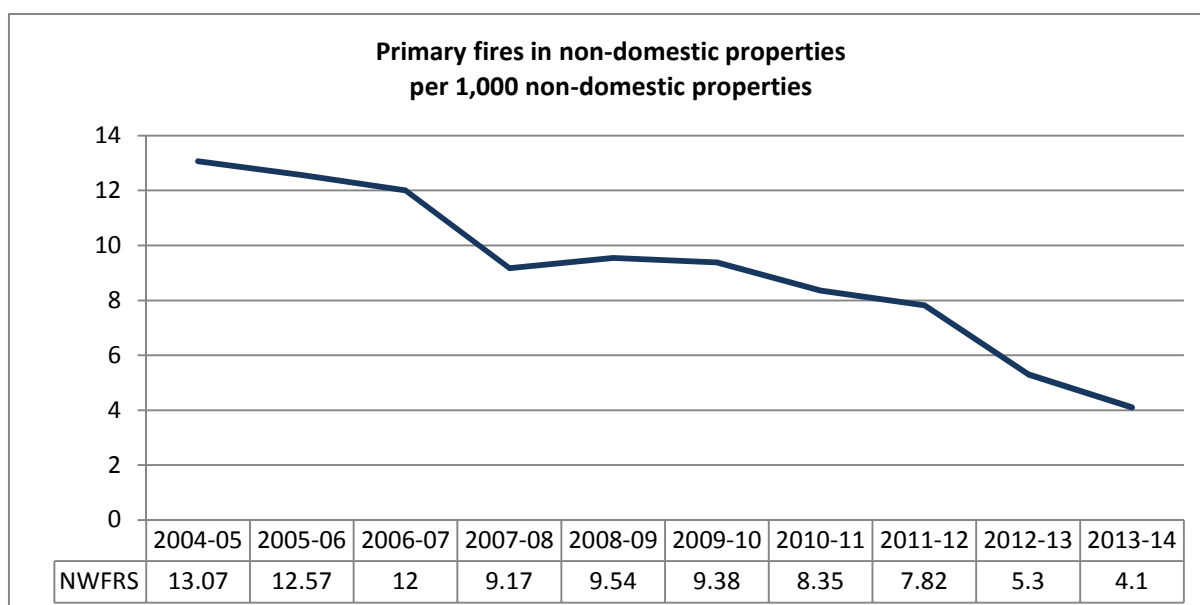


North Wales Fire and Rescue over the last ten years

The number of accidental fires in dwellings has also fallen over the past decade, although the rate of reduction has been irregular, with increases in four out of the past ten years. Overall, the number of these fires has fallen from 525 to 479.

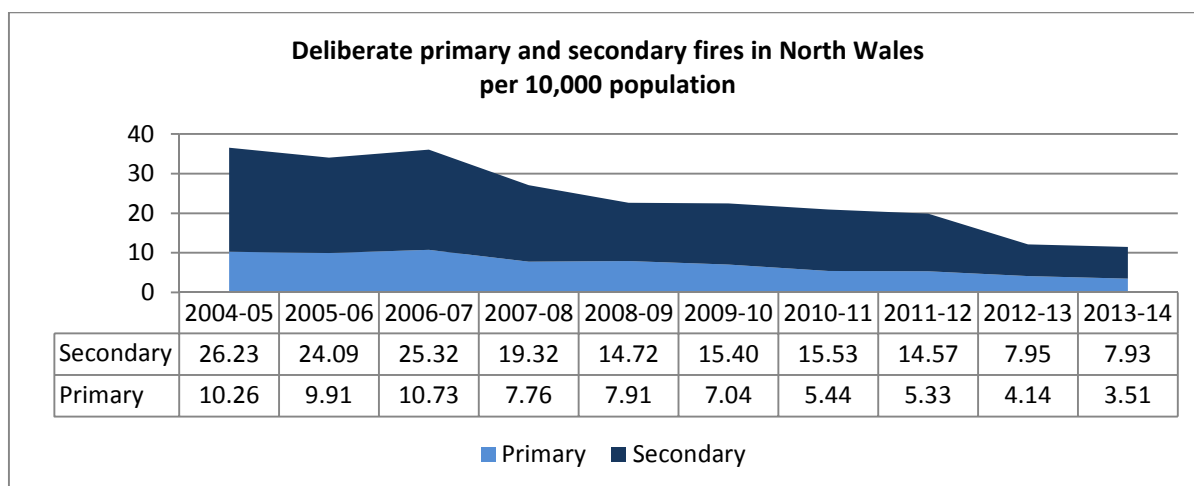


Similarly, the number of fires occurring in non-domestic properties has reduced, from an annual total of 605 to 115.

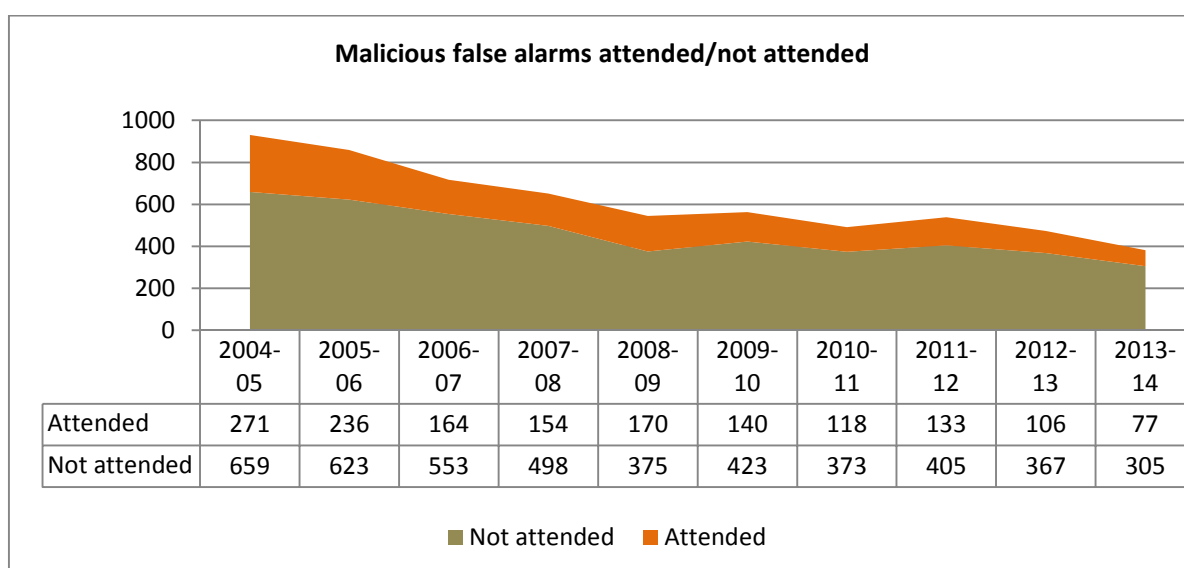


North Wales Fire and Rescue over the last ten years

Through an active and successful collaboration with North Wales Police, the incidence of arson and deliberate fire-setting has also fallen. Per 10,000 population, there have been consistently fewer deliberate fires in North Wales than elsewhere in Wales.



By challenging 999 callers suspected of placing bogus emergency calls, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service has successfully driven down the number of malicious false calls being made to its Control Centre. Of those that are made, Control staff have consistently succeeded in identifying almost 80% as malicious before making an unnecessary attendance at a non-existent emergency. In 2004-05, the Service attended around 5 such malicious false alarms per week. By 2013-14 this had been reduced to fewer than 2.



North Wales Fire and Rescue over the last ten years

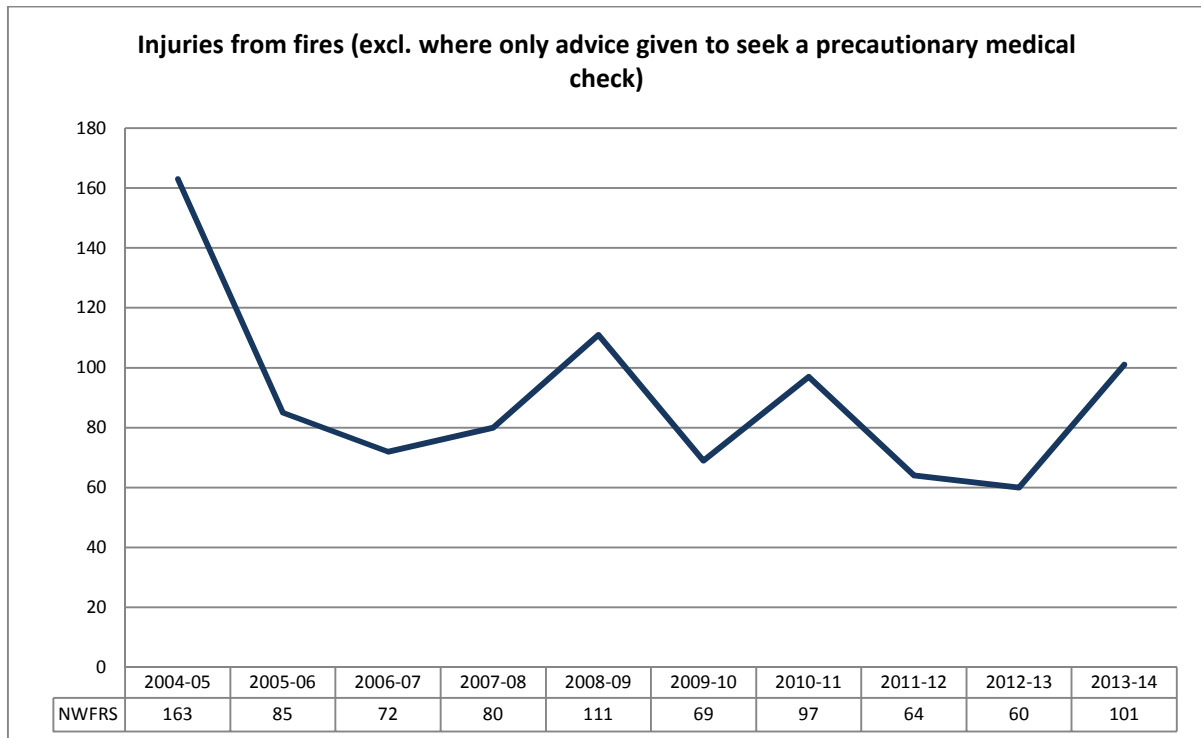
The number of people who die from fires in North Wales has fluctuated between three and thirteen per year. Some people die as a result of fires that were started deliberately (which would include suicide and arson), but the majority are the victims of accidental fires that occurred in their homes.

For North Wales, fire deaths figures as at February 2015 were:

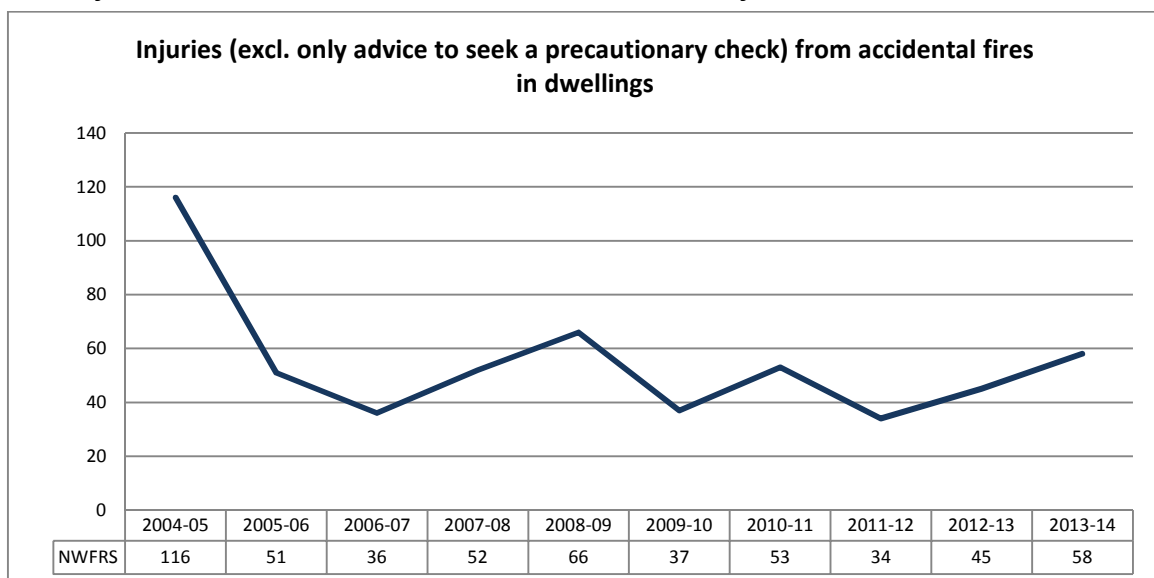
	From accidental fires	From accidental dwelling fires	From deliberate fires	From deliberate dwelling fires	Total fire deaths
2004-05	3	3	1	0	4
2005-06	6	5	1	0	7
2006-07	10	10	3	0	13
2007-08	8	8	2	1	10
2008-09	4	4	0	0	4
2009-10	7	7	2	2	9
2010-11	10	10	0	0	10
2011-12	8	6	0	0	8
2012-13	3	3	5	5	8
2013-14	3	3	0	0	3
	62	59	14	8	76

North Wales Fire and Rescue over the last ten years

The number of fire injuries in North Wales is following an overall downward trend, but the rate of reduction in fire injuries has been inconsistent and disappointingly slower than the rate of reduction in fires.



Understanding the cause of the apparently higher rate of accidental dwelling fire injuries in North Wales will be one of our Objective 1 actions in 2015/16.



Finances and Savings

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is financed mainly by contributions from the six unitary authorities in North Wales in proportion to their population. Its annual revenue budget is currently set at £32million.

In North Wales the cost per head of population for county council services rose by between £257 and £495 between 2006-07 and 2014-15. By contrast, the cost per head of population for fire and rescue services rose by just £3 during the same period.

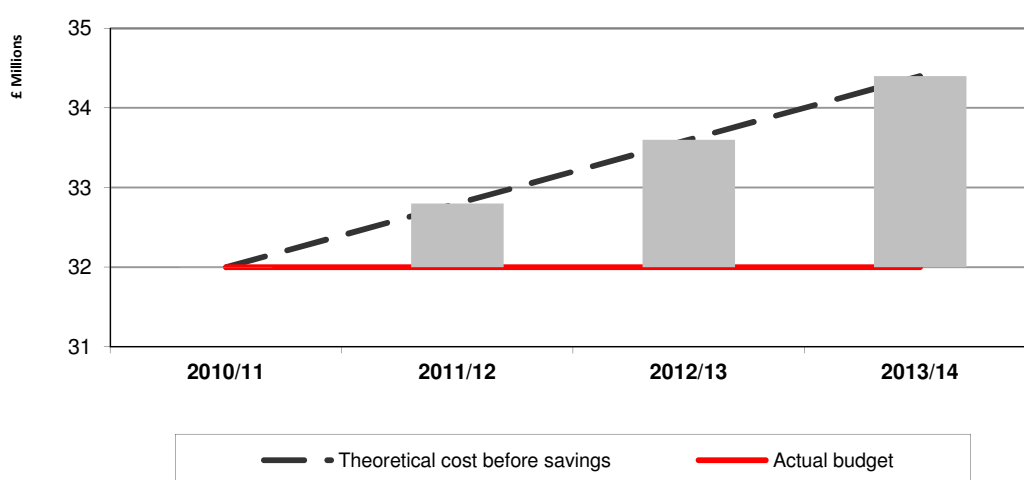
In recent years the cost per head of population has remained at £46.

£	Contribution 2011/12	Contribution 2012/13	Contribution 2013/14	Contribution 2014/15	Contribution 2015/16
Anglesey	3,236,545	3,219,270	3,216,231	3,198,669	3,200,523
Gwynedd	5,588,685	5,525,827	5,507,985	5,588,255	5,602,787
Conwy	5,240,568	5,206,959	5,198,570	5,283,704	5,289,891
Denbighshire	4,549,039	4,569,316	4,593,630	4,342,155	4,360,740
Flintshire	7,051,716	6,981,590	6,955,089	7,018,721	7,033,548
Wrexham	6,266,101	6,269,049	6,300,506	6,340,507	6,398,354
TOTAL	31,932,654	31,772,011	31,772,011	31,772,011	31,885,843
Cost per head of population	47	46	46	46	46

Finances and Savings

The Authority's first 3-year budget plan

The national economic downturn and the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2010 gave an indication of the level of cuts to public services that could be expected. Consequently, in December 2010, the Authority took the decision to freeze the annual budget available for running the Service at £32million for the next three years.



What this meant was that cost increases during those years (e.g. due to inflation or rises in fuel costs) had to be paid for from within the existing budget. Every year around £800,000 had to be taken away from some parts of the Service in order to pay for unavoidable cost increases.

In total, by the end of the third year (2013/14), annual savings of £2.45million had been achieved. The cost per head of population had been reduced from £47 to £46, and five out of the six county councils contributed less for fire and rescue services in 2013/14 than they had contributed three years earlier in 2010/11.

Finances and Savings

How savings were achieved during the first 3-year budget plan

In 2011/12 (Year 1)

- £200,000 cut from **individual budget lines**, discontinuing some completely or scaling them down.
- £50,000 cut from the **Community Fire Safety** budget.
- £90,000 cut from the **Support Staff** budget.
- £460,000 cut from the **Operational Management** budget by reducing the number of officers.
- £30,000 cut from the **Control** budget by restructuring its staffing arrangements.

In 2012/13 (Year 2)

- **Individual budget lines** were again cut or scaled down, releasing a further £150,000.
- Another £50,000 cut from the **Community Fire Safety** budget.
- Another £90,000 cut from the **Support Staff** budget.
- £500,000 released from the **Operational Firefighters'** budget by changing the way their shifts were rostered, so reducing the number of wholetime firefighters required by 10%.

In 2013/14 (Year 3)

- **Individual budget lines** were cut or scaled down for a third time, releasing a further £70,000.
- Another £50,000 cut from the **Community Fire Safety** budget.
- Another £180,000 cut from the **Support Staff** budget.
- A further £500,000 released from the **Operational Firefighters'** budget, by changing the way their shifts were rostered (as above).

A major part of the savings involved reducing the workforce, including managers, firefighters, community safety and support staff by an overall 9%. Despite these reductions, the Authority was able to continue to successfully deliver against its objectives.

Budget Plans after 2013/14

The second (intended) 3-year budget plan

Approaching the end of its first three-year budget plan, the Authority had to decide what to do for the next three years. It knew that having already reduced running costs the only way to achieve more savings would inevitably mean making cuts that the public would notice.

The Authority launched a public consultation in September 2013 that warned of the impact of a second three-year budget freeze. It explained that it would mean making significant changes to fire and rescue services because freezing the budget until 2016/17 would mean cutting £3.3million out of the budget on top of the £2.45million that had already been taken out over the period of the first 3-year budget plan.

The Authority was not minded at that time to embark on a programme of cuts, but it was acutely aware of the pressure on all public services to limit their spending, and that fire and rescue authorities were not immune to the effects of the harsh financial climate. The Authority therefore gave an undertaking that to help safeguard the county councils' budgets it would limit any increases in their financial contributions to a maximum equivalent of an additional £1 per year per head of population.

Towards the end of 2013, the Authority decided to maintain the current level of service provision. However, given the impact of the local government financial settlement (how much the county councils could expect to receive from central Welsh Government funds) and the reduction in the county councils' funding, the Authority chose an alternative strategy which was to freeze the budget for a fourth year (2014/15) and to use its financial reserves to cover any shortfall and so avoid introducing the large-scale cuts that would otherwise have been necessary.

However, this option would only be sustainable for one year and for subsequent years a consultation would have to be undertaken to consider the balance between budget pressures, service provision and the public risk.

Budget Plans after 2014/15

Keeping to its undertaking to limit any increase in county council financial contributions to a maximum equivalent of an additional £1 per year per head of population, the Authority decided to levy only a very small increase for 2015/16 so that the total contribution would still equate to under £46 per head of population.

In order to absorb some of the estimated £628,000 of unavoidable cost increases in 2015/16 the Authority decided to make savings by:

- ceasing to provide non-statutory rope rescue and large animal rescue services, saving around £16,000 a year;
- further reducing attendances to false alarms notified through automatic fire alarms, saving around £25,000 a year;
- further reducing operational manager posts (from 32 to 28), saving around £250,000 a year;

and to allocate £223,168 from its reserves to meet the shortfall.

	£	
Budget as in previous years	31,772,011	
Unavoidable cost increases in 2015/16	+ 628,000	
Savings to be made in 2015/16	-291,000	
Total budget requirement for 2015/16	32,109,011	
Contributions from county councils		31,885,843
Allocated from reserves		+223,168
Total budget available for 2015/16		32,109,011

Auditor General for Wales' Assessment

During 2014 the Wales Audit Office undertook an assessment of the Authority's financial position and how it was budgeting and delivering on financial plans. The assessment considered whether the Authority had a robust approach in place to manage budget challenges and to secure a stable financial position that will enable it to continue to operate for the foreseeable future. This assessment concluded that:

“The Authority has effective financial management arrangements with no immediate shortcomings.

The Authority has a good track record of effective budgetary control and securing arrangements to operate within its financial constraints.”

Wales Audit Office made some proposals to assist the Authority to strengthen its financial planning arrangements in the future:

1. to publish a formal Medium Term Financial Plan on its website;
2. to establish a clear policy around charging for services and income generation;
3. to establish clearer links between improvement objectives and financial plans;
4. to agree a written policy on the use of reserves.

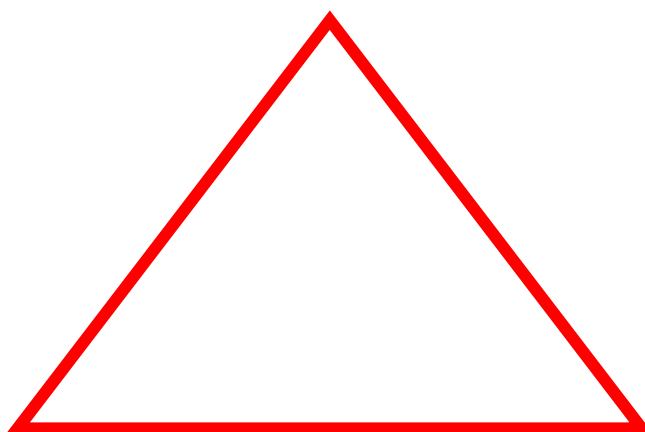
The Authority will therefore be taking steps to address these four proposals during 2015/16.

Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

The Authority set out its proposals for how it would develop its 2015-16 Improvement Objectives in last year's Improvement Plan, published in March 2014. Through a series of meetings, Members of the Authority considered a range of information to identify the main strategic priorities for the Authority.

The Authority recognised from the findings of this working group that in future it was likely to have to continue to face the same problems as had previously been identified, but with the additional pressure of an anticipated gloomy financial forecast for public services.

1. An increasing local demand for services



2. An increasingly unpredictable rate of demand for services

3. Less money available to provide services with

Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

1. An increasing local demand for services

The number of fire injuries in North Wales is gradually decreasing (please refer to previous section on performance and activity) but given the projected demographic changes in North Wales it looks likely that the demands of preventing dwelling fires and casualties will increase.

A research project in 2006 into the causes of fire deaths in North Wales revealed that there were 7 factors that in combination contributed to making individuals more vulnerable to becoming victims of fire.

During the 2013 consultation on the 2014/15 Improvement Objectives, it was brought to the Authority's attention that some people – particularly people with disabilities – dislike the use of the term 'vulnerable person' as it could give the wrong impression.

However, this term is used by the Authority as a description of what makes some people a higher priority for support and advice to reduce the chances of their being involved in a dwelling fire. The more contributory factors that apply, the greater their risk of becoming the victim of a dwelling fire unless they take additional measures to counteract those factors. The Authority's prevention strategy is structured around finding ways of removing or countering the effects of as many of the contributory factors as possible, thereby making individuals less vulnerable.

Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

The contributory factors that make people statistically more vulnerable were found to be:

- being alone at the time of the fire;
- unusual or particular behaviour, such as smoking in bed, cooking whilst under the influence of alcohol, or hoarding and living in extreme clutter;
- having no working smoke alarm installed in the dwelling;
- being subject to factors normally associated with old age, such as reduced mobility, declining sensory responses and reduced appreciation of physical limitations; or alternatively having the limited appreciation of fire hazards, inappropriate response to a fire situation and a high dependence on adults that the very young would typically have;
- being under the influence of alcohol or some drugs that affect levels of consciousness, speed of reaction and decision making;
- living in rented property;
- having a disability that limits mobility and/or reaction to a fire.

Projections for North Wales indicate that these contributory factors will continue to require a comprehensive fire prevention strategy in the area. Specifically:

- the number of households looks set to continue to increase, with a higher proportion of those households occupied by only one person. This increases the likelihood of being alone when a fire occurs, and increases the demand for smoke alarms.
- more people are living longer, but associated with that is a projection that more people will be living with dementia, and more people will be being cared for in their own homes.
- the number of children is projected to rise in the medium term, before falling slightly in the longer term.
- the incidence of smoking and alcohol and drug misuse remain relatively high in Wales.

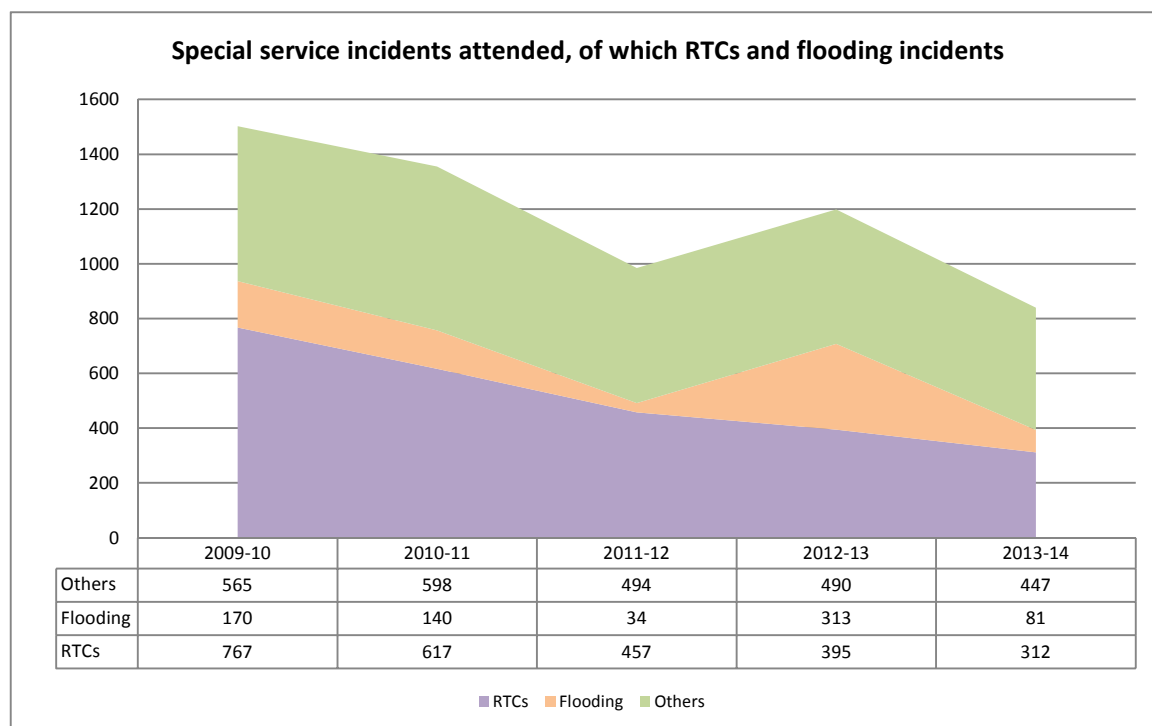
Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

2. The unpredictability of incidents

The number of special service incidents (that is, non-fire emergencies) attended can vary considerably from year to year – this has been particularly evident in the number of flooding incidents attended.

The impact on the service is that it has to ensure that it has sufficient resources available to cope with large variations in levels of demand whilst maintaining cover throughout the region.

This relates to both the number of simultaneous incidents and the duration of incidents that can tie up resources for long periods of time.



Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

3. Less money available to provide services with

Public spending in Wales is likely to be placed under increasing pressure over the next few years.

Launching a report² in January 2015 on Fire and Rescue Service efficiency in Wales, the Minister for Public Services said:

“I commissioned this report because the Fire and Rescue Service is not and cannot be immune from the severe financial pressures affecting the public sector; and must take all viable steps to secure efficiencies.

I know the three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales have taken this agenda seriously and have secured some notable savings in recent years. However, as financial pressures continue to increase, so will the need to review each and every aspect of spend to ensure it remains appropriate. It is vital for leaders within the fire sector to take the initiative in securing greater efficiencies.”

² <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsilg/publications/fire/150122-fire-efficiency-report-en.pdf>

Fire and Rescue Service Efficiency A report by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser for Wales. October 2014, published January 2015.

Public consultation – your views

The Authority runs an annual public consultation on its draft Improvement Objectives. In developing the 2015/16 improvement plan the Authority consulted from October 2014 to January 2015 and encouraged people to submit their views.

A consultation document entitled ‘Your Services, Your Choices’ was produced to explain the current financial situation and to invite people to state their support for one of three possible funding options. People were able to do this by accessing a link to an electronic questionnaire hosted on a consultation hub.

The public were made aware of the consultation including through direct notification, social media and press coverage. Face to face briefing sessions were also provided for all six county councils in North Wales.

The consultation received 291 responses from a wide cross-section of people and including a balanced distribution of service employees and others.

Option 1

To continue to freeze the annual budget until 2019/20 and make £3.3million of cuts (10%) to fire and rescue services in North Wales. In other words, local county councils would pay the same as they have been paying since 2010, even if that meant closing fire stations, removing fire engines and reducing the number of employees.

Of the 291 responses received, 34 (12%) supported this option.

Option 2

To follow the Welsh Government's advice at the time and cut the annual budget by at least the same percentage as will be cut from central funding (the "local government settlement") that local authorities receive from Welsh Government. This would be the harshest option, probably requiring more than a 10% cut in fire and rescue services in North Wales. In other words, local county councils would pay less than they had been paying since 2010, even if that meant closing even more fire stations, removing even more fire engines and cutting the workforce even more.

Of the 291 responses received, 14 (5%) supported this option.

Option 3

To increase the Authority's annual budget by an overage of 2% each year until 2019/20 and avoid making the £3.3million of cuts (10%) to fire and rescue services in North Wales. In other words, local county councils might pay more than they have been paying since 2010 to protect front line fire and rescue services, but with the safeguard that this would not increase their contributions by any more than the equivalent of an additional £1 per North Wales resident every year.

Of the 291 responses received, 235 (81%) supported this option.

A further 8 responses (3%) did not specifically state which option they supported.

One response was particularly keen to emphasise the value of involving community representatives and people from across the protected characteristics groups in service planning, design, commissioning and delivery. We agree, and although for several years we have been specifically targeting collaborations with third sector organisations and others who represent various groups of people, we recognise that we may be able to do more to demonstrate the value of our engagement with the various groups of people. We have therefore taken the opportunity to commission an extended social research project to explore our past and potential future engagement with people in North Wales.

Improvement Objective 1

To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.

Why has this objective been chosen?

Because keeping people safe is at the heart of what the Authority does. The safety of people in North Wales is its primary concern, but also it makes much better sense to prevent incidents from happening than to simply react every time they do.

The Authority is committed to retaining its annual target of delivering 30,000 Home Fire Safety Checks to householders in North Wales, but the demographics of North Wales and the identified behaviours mean that prevention activity may need to increase in order to keep pace, and that response services will need to remain available to deal with failures and the unexpected or genuinely unpreventable accidents. For many years the Authority has been reminding people that prevention is better than cure, and it still believes that.

Furthermore, the Authority is very clearly mandated to work in this direction - the Welsh Government's Programme for Wales sets out its own commitment to improving community safety, which is reflected in its Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 Onwards.

What is the expected outcome?

People expect to be safe in their homes. With the right support and advice, people can protect themselves from accidental fires, both by preventing a fire from starting in the first instance, and by knowing how to react quickly and correctly if one does occur.

Where that has failed, people should have confidence that the fire and rescue service will respond quickly and effectively to rescue them and limit the damage to their property.

The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2015/16

What new actions are planned for 2015-16?

1. Continue to seek more partner organisations to collaborate with the Authority on reducing the incidence and impact of accidental dwelling fires.
2. Aim to deliver 30,000 Home Fire Safety Checks during the year, with priority given to the most vulnerable, and with a minimum of 30% of the checks undertaken following a referral from a partner organisation.
3. Monitor the impact of linked smoke detectors in dwellings where resident remote monitoring care systems have been installed.
4. Review the way fire injuries are being recorded to ensure the availability of high quality comparative information.

What specifically will be reported back to the public after the end of the year?

Outputs

- The number of home fire safety checks delivered, with a target of 30,000 during the year.
- The percentage of home fire safety checks delivered as a result of a referral from a partner agency, with a minimum target of 30% of the overall number delivered.

Outcomes

- The number of deaths arising from accidental dwelling fires compared with previous years and in other areas.
- The number of injuries (especially in the more serious categories) sustained at accidental dwelling fires compared with previous years and in other areas.
- The percentage of people involved in accidental dwelling fires who were able to escape unharmed without needing assistance from a fire crew to do so compared with previous years.

The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2015/16

Improvement Objective 2

To fund the current level of service until 2019/20, but to find ways of ensuring that the cost of doing so does not add more than the equivalent of an additional £1 per year per head of population to the revenue budget.

Why has this objective been chosen?

With careful financial management and planning, the Authority was able to avoid increasing its annual budget between 2010/11 and 2014/15 by making savings and relying on financial reserves.

The Authority's public consultation in 2014 explained the challenging financial situation and the Authority's aspiration to continue to meet public demand for services whilst keeping its costs down. 81% of the responses to the consultation supported protecting fire and rescue services, increasing the budget if necessary but with the safeguard that any increase in the amount levied each year on the county councils should not go up by any more than the equivalent of an additional £1 for every North Wales resident.

What is the expected outcome?

That the Authority will be able to maintain the current level of service (i.e. without closing fire stations or removing fire appliances) with a revenue budget of £31,885,843 for 2015/16, which is the equivalent of around £46 per head of population in North Wales.

The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2015/16

What new actions are planned for 2015-16?

1. Continue to focus on minimising budgetary increases and identifying efficiencies within the Service.
2. Operational Resourcing Strategy to include identifying and recruiting within a range of staffing models.
3. Continue to explore opportunities to save money through collaboration and joint working.

What specifically will be reported back to the public after the end of the year?

Budget reports and financial information presented to the Authority.

Improvement Objective 3

To ensure that North Wales gets the best possible level of service within financial constraints, use a variety of management solutions to optimise fire and rescue cover in the area

Why has this objective been chosen?

In its public consultation in 2012, the Authority explained some of the difficulties of providing fire and rescue services in predominantly rural areas. In North Wales, the majority of fire stations are crewed exclusively by firefighters working the Retained Duty System (RDS), where crew members are paid an annual retainer and fees for attending incidents.

The vast majority of RDS staff are genuinely committed to the work, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain staff who are able to both provide fire cover and hold down a full time job with their primary employer. This duty system suited previous generations very well as people generally stayed within their communities without travelling far for either work or leisure, and companies could afford to employ large numbers of staff. Now, however, primary employers are under pressure to operate with as few employees as possible, making it less likely that they can afford to allow their staff to leave their place of work to attend an emergency incident for the Fire and Rescue Service.

In recent years the Service has implemented a system of self-rostering on wholtime stations and has been trialling a new part time firefighter contract that guarantees at least 21 hours of work per week as an alternative to the traditional RDS contract.

Taking the long term sustainability and affordability of services as guiding principles, the Authority proposes that this work of finding suitable alternative options for providing fire and rescue services in North Wales should continue to develop.

The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2015/16

What is the expected outcome?

Sustainable and affordable fire and rescue service provision that can continue to cope with fluctuating and unpredictable levels of demand.

What new actions are planned for 2015-16?

1. Seek to explore and adopt different methods of providing fire cover.
2. As part of the resourcing strategy, to explore the possibility of introducing an apprenticeship scheme.
3. Undertake workforce planning and identify strategies for reducing costs.

What specifically will be reported back to the public after the end of the year?

Evaluation of new contracts and reports of progress against the actions listed above.

Appendix

This appendix contains additional background information about the Authority, the duty to continuously improve, and other general information.

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Its role is to perform all the duties and responsibilities of a Fire Authority in accordance with appropriate legislation and regulations, approve its Improvement and Risk Reduction Plans, approve its revenue and capital budgets and the contribution for the constituent councils, monitor the revenue and capital budgets and deal with any significant variations, including decisions on any revised or supplementary contributions.

The Authority's **Executive Panel** consists of 14 voting members, namely the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority and two members selected from among the members of each of the six constituent Authorities.

The Authority's **Audit Committee** consists of the 14 voting members who are not on the Executive Panel. This committee has its own Chair and Deputy Chair.

The Authority's **Standards Committee** consist of 4 independent members and 2 members of the Authority.

The **Clerk and Monitoring Officer's** role is to ensure meetings are administered in accordance with relevant legislation and regulation, to deal with code of conduct issues, overall governance and democratic arrangements and legal and procedural matters.

The **Treasurer's** role is to provide financial advice relating to revenue and capital funding issues, investment and cashflow, to keep proper accounting records and take reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud or financial irregularities. He is responsible for the preparation of the Authority's Statement of Accounts in accordance with proper practices to give a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position and income and expenditure.

The North Wales Fire Services 1995 Combination Scheme Order established the Authority (replacing the former Gwynedd and Clwyd Fire Brigades), made provision for the control and administration of its finances, and defined the area it would cover.

In setting its budget for the following financial year, the Authority is required to submit an estimate of its net expenses to each constituent authority before the end of December, and subsequently, before 15th February, give notice of the actual amount of contribution to be paid by that authority in the next financial year.

Detailed information on the role of the Fire and Rescue Authority and the general guidelines which apply are set out in Standing Orders (available on the website at www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk or on request).

The Authority's specific duties and powers are prescribed in a range of legislation and regulations, but the key ones are:

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 that specifies a Fire and Rescue Authority's core duties as:

- **Promoting fire safety in its area.** This includes making the necessary arrangements for:
 - Providing information, publicity and encouragement to people about how to prevent fires and avoid becoming a casualty of fire.
 - Giving advice (on request) about how to prevent fires and restrict their spread in buildings and other property; the means of escape from buildings and other property in case of fire.
- **Dealing with calls for help.** This includes obtaining the necessary information and summoning the personnel to deal with incidents of fire, road traffic accidents and other defined emergencies.
- **Fighting fires in its area.** This includes providing the personnel (and their training), services and equipment to meet the normal requirements of extinguishing fires and protecting life and property in the event of fires.
- **Rescuing people from road traffic accidents in its area.** This includes providing the personnel (and their training), services and equipment to meet the normal requirements of protecting people from serious harm (to the extent that it considers it reasonable) in road traffic accidents.

- **Dealing with other emergencies.** The nature, extent and geographical area of this requirement would be set out by government and may require or authorise the Authority to secure the provision of the personnel (and their training), services and equipment to deal with emergencies other than fires and road traffic accidents.
- **Responding to other eventualities.** The Authority may take any action it considers appropriate in relation to an event or situation that might cause harm to people or the environment, including the life and health of plants and animals.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 that confers powers and places duties on a Fire and Rescue Authority as an enforcing authority for the purpose of inspecting and enforcing fire safety in relevant premises in its area.

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 that defines the powers and duties of specified categories of local bodies to prepare contingency plans for, and respond to emergency events or situations that threaten serious damage to human welfare or the environment, and war or terrorism that threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom.

MAKING IMPROVEMENTS AND REDUCING RISK

The **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** came into effect from April 2010. It requires Welsh Improvement Authorities (county councils, national parks authorities and fire and rescue authorities) to set improvement objectives and make arrangements to achieve them.

Improvement objectives can be anything that can be shown to improve what the Welsh Improvement Authority does (its 'functions') in terms of at least one out of seven aspects of improvement, namely:

1. strategic effectiveness;
2. service quality;
3. service availability;
4. fairness;
5. sustainability;
6. efficiency; and
7. innovation.

Fire and Rescue Authorities, as Welsh Improvement Authorities, have been issued with their own specific guidance relating to Part 1 of the Measure concerned with improvement.

Their operations will be subject to an Improvement Assessment by the Auditor General for Wales (operating through the Wales Audit Office) that is undertaken through a forward-looking Corporate Assessment and a retrospective Performance Assessment in each financial year.

A copy of the guidance document is available from the Welsh Government's website.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/publications/?lang=en>.

Continuously Striving for Improvement

The role of the Fire and Rescue Authority is defined in a range of laws and regulations but the Authority has always sought to improve and enhance the services it provides and to do more than simply meet minimum requirements.

The Authority is committed to enhancing people's lives in a number of different ways. These include playing a part in making sure that:

- citizens, workers and visitors are protected so that they can live long and healthy lives;
- whole communities are protected so that people can lead fulfilled lives;
- the area's culture, heritage and language are protected so that people can lead enriched lives;
- cities, towns and villages are protected so that they can be economically and socially vibrant places for people to live, work and visit;
- the countryside and coastlines are protected so that they can continue to provide natural habitats and be rewarding places for people to live, work and visit;
- individual homes are protected, so that people have access to good, safe, housing;
- public buildings are protected so that people can feel safe when they conduct business there;
- workplaces are protected so that people can feel safe when they work there;
- transport networks are protected so that people and goods can pass between places freely and safely;
- the environment and the world's resources are protected so that we leave the world a better place.

Furthermore, the Authority is fully committed to ensuring that:

- it does not waste the money and other resources entrusted to it;
- it supports its employees to achieve their full potential and share their knowledge and skills with others.

Arrangements to secure continuous improvement

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has made specific arrangements to support the achievement of its improvement and risk reduction strategies.

Governance Arrangements

The Authority itself is organised in such a way that its 28 elected members can maintain a proper involvement in strategic planning, in decision-making and in monitoring the service's levels of performance. The full Authority meets regularly, at least four times per year, with more frequent meetings of the Executive Panel between times. It has an Audit Committee and a separate Standards Committee that meet to consider specific issues. The Authority's correct functioning is further supported by its Clerk and Treasurer. Meetings are open to the public, and records of the Authority's transactions are available from the Authority's website.

The Service is led and managed by the Chief Fire Officer supported by the principal officer team, the senior management team, specialist advisers, and a defined organisational structure.

The Service's structure is aligned to the six North Wales local authority areas, and works in partnership through specific collaborative arrangements with a wide range of organisations including other emergency services, members of the local resilience forum, health, education and voluntary sectors, specific agencies and commissions and local service boards. Where appropriate, formal agreements are entered into for the sharing of data.

Progress against specific departmental and project plans, annual service plans and detailed budget plans is monitored and reported regularly throughout the year, with in-year adjustments to plans being agreed where necessary.

Separate assurance processes are provided through internal and external audits, including financial audits.

Arrangements to secure continuous improvement

Collaboration

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority supports collaboration with other fire and rescue services in a range of improvement activities, pooling expertise and sharing resources (e.g. joint procurement of equipment, joint recruitment of wholetime firefighters) where appropriate, at both UK and Wales levels.

National Issues Committee (NIC)

The Welsh Fire and Rescue Services' National Issues Committee (NIC) was established in 2012 to further improve collaborative working, service delivery and sustained service improvement.

The Key Collaborative Areas of the NIC are:

1. National Crewing Arrangements
2. National Community Safety Delivery Systems
3. Joint Public Service Centre Project
4. National Fire Cover Review
5. National Fleet and Transport
6. National ICT Platforms

Other Collaboration

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority also supports collaboration with a range of partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This includes collaboration for the purposes of:

- realising its own aims and objectives
- local and national resilience, and
- supporting multi-agency improvement through Single Integrated Plans.

General Statement

The Local Government Measure 2009 introduced a general duty for Welsh Improvement Authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. Whilst there could never be an absolute duty to improve, there is an expectation that authorities will make suitable arrangements to improve and set themselves realistic, relevant and sufficiently ambitious objectives.

Authorities are required to make a general statement outlining the nature of their intentions for discharging the general duty to improve.

In accordance with this legislation, North Wales Fire and Rescue develops and publishes an annual improvement and risk reduction plan upon which it has consulted. This plan is published as soon as possible after 31 December in the year prior to the financial year to which it relates, and itemises the improvement objectives and associated measures of success for the forthcoming financial year.

Once agreement has been reached about the level of funding that the authority will have available (by mid February prior to the start of the financial year), budgets are allocated to specific purposes. This includes revenue spending and the roll-out of the capital programme.

Departmental plans showing how the high level objectives will be achieved (with associated quantitative targets where appropriate) are developed by the end of March.

Central monitoring by senior management of spending and the completion of planned objectives takes place at quarterly meetings through the year, so that any in-year adjustments can be made if necessary. Progress reports are provided to the Authority throughout the year. External assessment of progress is provided by Wales Audit Office.

A summary of the achievement of objectives is provided through the following year's Performance Assessment, published by 31 October in relation to the previous financial year, and through the Treasurer's report to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

OTHER INFORMATION

CONTACT DETAILS

Postal address: North Wales Fire and Rescue
Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Ffordd Salesbury
St Asaph Business Park
St Asaph
Denbighshire
LL17 0JJ

Telephone: 01745 535250

Website: www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The **Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004** came into effect in October 2004, replacing the previous Fire and Rescue Services Act 1947 in England and Wales.
It clarifies the duties and powers of Fire and Rescue Authorities to:
 - Promote fire safety
 - Fight fires
 - Protect people and property from fires
 - Rescue people from road traffic accidents
 - Respond to other specified risks, such as chemical incidents
 - Respond to large scale emergencies such as terrorist attacks
- The **National Framework 2012 Onwards** was issued by the Welsh Government under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It sets out the Welsh Government's vision and priorities for the three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales and what is expected of them during the lifespan of the framework.
- **The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** came into effect from 1st April 2010. It created a statutory regime that integrates shorter term local service improvement and long term community planning. Specific guidance relating to the improvement element (Part 1) for fire and rescue services was issued by the Welsh Government in May 2010.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The **Fire and Rescue Authorities (Improvement Plans) (Wales) Order 2012** came into force on May 21st 2012. It requires fire and rescue authorities to publish their improvement plan as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December in the year prior to the financial year to which the improvement plan relates.
- **Previous year's Performance** - Section 15 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 places a duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities to publish performance information relating to each financial year, by 31 October, in the year following that to which the performance relates. The Authority's assessment of its performance in 2011-12 is available from the Performance and Improvement Section of its website – www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk.
- The **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005** came into effect in October 2006, replacing over 70 pieces of fire safety law. It applies to all non-domestic premises in England and Wales, including the communal parts of blocks of flats and houses in multiple occupation. It abolished the requirement for businesses to have fire certificates and put the onus on the person responsible for the premises to address fire safety in those premises.
- The **Equality Act 2010** replaced over 100 pieces of equality law. The General Duty and specific duties for the public sector in Wales came into force in April 2011.
- The **Civil Contingencies Act 2004** provides a single framework for civil protection to large scale emergencies that threaten serious damage to human welfare, the environment or to security. Fire and Rescue Services are 'Category 1' responders under this act.
- **Welsh Government Fire Branch**
The responsibility for providing fire and rescue services and promoting fire safety in Wales was devolved to the National Assembly for Wales on 10 November 2004. The Community Safety division of the Welsh Assembly Government is based at Rhydycar, Merthyr Tydfil CF48 1UZ. <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/?lang=en>

- **Wales Audit Office**

The Wales Audit Office publishes reports on behalf of the Auditor General who is required to assess the likelihood that the Authority will continue to improve and whether the Authority is discharging its duties and acting in accordance with relevant issued guidance. Auditors also work with fire authorities across Wales to deliver a programme of financial and value-for-money audits.

<http://www.wao.gov.uk/>

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INTERVENTION IN THE EVENT OF FAILURE OR POTENTIAL FAILURE TO COMPLY

The Welsh Government has powers of intervention:

- under section 22 of the **Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004** if it considers that a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing, or is likely to fail, to act in accordance with the National Framework. In such cases, section 23 - Intervention Protocol would apply.
- under section 29 of the **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** if it considers that a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing, or is at risk of failing, to comply with the Measure. However, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, Welsh Ministers may only intervene after they have offered voluntary support to the Authority under section 28 of the Measure.

CONSULTATIONS

Full Risk Reduction Plan	Summer 2009		
Full Risk Reduction and Improvement Plan	Summer 2010	October 2010	2011-12
Improvement Objectives	Summer 2011	October 2011	2012-13
Improvement Objectives	Autumn 2012	March 2013	2013-14
Improvement Objectives	Autumn 2013	March 2014	2014-15
Funding and the level of Fire and Rescue Services	Autumn 2014	March 2015	2015-16

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Sections 5 and 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 require the Authority to consult widely before coming to final decisions about improvement.

The Authority conducts a public consultation each year when it publicises its proposed improvement and risk reduction objectives for the following year and invites comments from anyone with an interest in what the Authority does. All comments received are taken into account before finalising the following year's plans.

Anyone wishing to contribute new ideas about future improvement objectives should write to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer at the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Ffordd Salesbury, St. Asaph Business Park, St. Asaph, Denbighshire LL17 0JJ.